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Letter dated 31 December 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to Security Council resolution 2433 (2018), by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) until 31 August 2019 and asked me to provide recommendations to improve the management of UNIFIL civilian resources, including through fostering enhanced cooperation with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, with the goal of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the missions.

As the Council is aware, the United Nations presence in Lebanon does not follow the standard integration model under which the special representative of the Secretary-General oversees all political, peacekeeping and development activities. The United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, as my most senior representative in the country, coordinates all United Nations activities and is responsible for all political aspects of the work of the Organization in Lebanon, including those related to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). This includes supporting efforts to secure agreements from the Government of Lebanon and the Government of Israel on the principles and elements of a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution, as provided for in the resolution, as well as developing proposals to implement the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords and Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), including provisions for disarmament and for the delineation of the international borders of Lebanon, which also entails addressing the issue of the Shab'a Farms.

The overarching political mandate of the Special Coordinator is to implement resolution 1701 (2006), while the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander interacts with the Lebanese political authorities to address operational requirements. In accordance with its mandate, UNIFIL continues to monitor the cessation of hostilities; to assist the Lebanese Armed Forces in taking steps towards the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani River of an area free of any unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons; and to take all necessary action, within its capabilities, to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind.

As indicated in my letter to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/202), a strategic priority for UNIFIL is to further promote an integrated, comprehensive approach to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), in close coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the United Nations country team. This includes preventing a resumption of hostilities across the Blue Line and meeting the outstanding commitments of the parties.

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As part of this integrated approach, the Office of the Special Coordinator and UNIFIL are coordinating their support for the Government of Lebanon to build the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces and strengthen their presence in southern Lebanon and the country's territorial waters. In particular, UNIFIL and the Office are working closely, in conjunction with the caretaker Government of Lebanon, to respond to the request made by the Security Council in its resolution 2433 (2018), paragraph 7.

The Office of the Special Coordinator and UNIFIL already engage in a number of shared or complementary activities. Coordination and cooperation between the substantive offices of UNIFIL and the Office of the Special Coordinator occur between the respective political offices, and between the UNIFIL Civil Affairs Office and the Office of the Special Coordinator in conjunction with the United Nations country team in Lebanon. The political and public information offices work closely together, including on the drafting of periodic reports on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and to ensure coordinated public outreach. The analytical products of the UNIFIL Joint Mission Analysis Centre are also available to the Office of the Special Coordinator. As the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander is also the designated official for security issues south of the Litani River, UNIFIL cooperates and coordinates with the Office of the Special Coordinator on security issues, scenario development and contingency planning, including on the protection of civilians.

UNIFIL also provides administrative support to the Office of the Special Coordinator in the areas of finance, procurement, information, communications and technology, transport, engineering, health, supply, customs procedures, contract management and security. In addition, support and substantive staff of the Office use the training facilities and capabilities of UNIFIL. This pooling of resources has led to significant streamlining of administrative staff at the Office. UNIFIL also provides support in cross-cutting areas such as gender, HIV/AIDS, the environment and conduct and discipline. The UNIFIL Legal Affairs Section provides support to both missions.

In addition to the ongoing efforts of UNIFIL and the Office of the Special Coordinator to improve coordination, a review of UNIFIL civilian staffing was conducted, resulting in the abolition of 146 posts (completed in 2017).

While retaining the complementarity, uniqueness and distinction necessary for UNIFIL and the Office of the Special Coordinator to maintain their respective comparative advantages and facilitate the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), there is still room for the two missions to explore how to increase their coordination and enhance their efficiency and effectiveness. In this regard, I recommend that UNIFIL and the Office of the Special Coordinator undertake the following:

(a) Optimize coordination of their political, public information and security strategies: strengthen coordination between the Office of the Special Coordinator and UNIFIL leadership and staff to develop a common prevention strategy with a view to de-escalating tensions between the parties and mitigating risks that could jeopardize the cessation of hostilities; jointly analyse the progress made in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), including through improved information-sharing and joint conflict and situation analysis; and identify opportunities for further collaboration with national authorities, in particular with regard to extending State authority in the south of the country;

(b) Ensure increased coordination in the provision of support to the Lebanese Armed Forces: harmonize technical and political objectives and take joint or complementary measures to strengthen the capacities of the Lebanese Armed Forces,

building on the efforts of the International Support Group for Lebanon, including the Ministerial Meeting in support of Lebanon's Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces, and on the strategic dialogue between the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL, to support the rapid and sustainable deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon and the country's territorial waters;

(c) Rationalize resources: assess opportunities for further savings following the market research conducted by the Office of the Special Coordinator in 2017/18 to find alternative premises in Beirut, and explore new ways to streamline administrative services.

I will follow up on these recommendations, as appropriate, in my periodic reports on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**